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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0339  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1935  
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SUBJECT: SUKKUR, PAKISTAN: LOOKING TO THE USG FOR SUCCOR

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During a February 2 visit to Sukkur, the business, education and communication hub of Upper Sindh, PolOff attended the inauguration of a USAID funded initiative. In separate meeting, Hindu minority leaders discussed professional discrimination and their ongoing security concerns, NGO activists from outlying areas used the term 'tribal terrorism' in outlining the challenges they face and rural women entrepreneurs supported by the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) requested USG aid for technical development as a sustainable handicraft based micro-finance organization.

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HINDUS AND SECURITY CONCERNS  
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¶2. (U) A significant minority in Upper Sindh, the Hindu Panchyat (HP) represents a highly educated demographic of engineers, doctors and businessmen among others. They complained, however, of facing discrimination in professional settings and particularly that they are banned from entering the military sector. HP demanded a census to update the old and now obsolete data of the 1998 census as these percentages are critical for acquiring 'reserved for minority' jobs in the government; the old data cited minorities as 3 percent of the population whereas they believe it is now about 10 percent.

¶3. (SBU) The blasphemy law, kidnapping for ransom, and forced conversion head the HP's list of concerns facing their community. Dr. Dwarkadas, member of the HP, detailed the case of Dr. Pavan Kumar who was detained on blasphemy charges for his proclamation that 'Disprin' (an aspirin based medication) has life saving powers and not Allah. He is currently on bail but could face execution if convicted. HP asked for USG assistance in urging the GoP to change this law. Kidnapping for ransom is common in rural areas and because the Hindus are relatively wealthy they are frequently targeted. When we pressed them on their original complaint of forced conversion of young girls to Islam without parental consent, they admitted they were actually referring to adult Hindu females who choose to marry Muslim men and must convert to Islam as part of religious edict. Thus, while there may be some cases of forced conversion, this is more of an issue of community control.

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FEUDALISM AMOUNTS TO 'TRIBAL TERRORISM'  
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¶4. (SBU) Hussain Sarang, the Director of the Regional Development Organization of Coordinating Council (RDOCC), which is located in Ghotki, emphatically declared that he and his organization were

"political but non-partisan" entities. Affirming that feudalism is rampant in his area, he claimed that feudal lords waged 'tribal terrorism' by threatening physical violence, abduction of daughters, and eviction from property against citizens in their areas. Sarang claimed that ethnic Pashtuns are involved in supplying arms to these 'tribal terrorists.'

15. (SBU) Mohammad Bachal Abro, the Director of Development Planning Management Graduates Coordination Society (DPMGC), which is located in Shikharpur, explained that his organization brings solutions to the common man's problems to their doorstep. Under his leadership, the DPMGC has reopened thirty-one schools, campaigned against violence against women and taken a public stand against tribal feuds. As an example, he referenced the Jatoi/Mahar feud, which started in 1987 over the issue of land and a fish pond, and has taken a number of lives. Both Abro and Sarang advocated for academic and infrastructure development and promotion of gender equality in the educational sector.

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BACK TO SCHOOL AGAIN; BUT FIRST, GIVE US A SCHOOL!  
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16. (U) The Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) operates in villages around Sukkur where it supports and trains local craftswomen and markets their products including blankets, bags, scarves and serving trays. PolOff met with their cadre of rural women entrepreneurs who discussed challenges they faced and opportunities provided by SRSO; they requested support for vocational centers to develop skills in sewing, patchwork and information technology as well as improved educational

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opportunities, particularly for their daughters.

17. (U) Shahida Begum, a master trainer at SRSO, is a role model for her peers; she is committed to finding ways to share her knowledge with other young women to create a sustainable cottage industry. Lack of technical equipment is her main challenge and she reiterated SRSO's desire for a vocational training center stocked with machinery, material and training staff.

18. (U) Shahida lamented how cultural boundaries in her village have affected their livelihoods; she discussed how the men in her area are not securely employed and despite the fact the craftswomen support their households, they do not get the freedom or the respect they believe they deserve. Girls have limited opportunity for education and she noted that one girls' public school in her village does not even have a teacher. Dynamic and passionate, Shahida has recently enrolled in middle school again to complete her matriculation. Mother of seven children, Shahida has a daughter in the ninth grade who Shahida hopes will help her with her homework!

19. (SBU) COMMENT: Eloquent and passionate about the concerns of their community, the HP opened the meeting by asking if PolOff was there "to simply asses or to actually help." However, despite the challenges they collectively face, the community does not appear to be organized or realistic about their options. The HP members advocate a syllabus change that would introduce a Hindu scripture class option for Hindu students in the public school system, but admitted they had yet to submit such a proposal to the government. Complaints and accolades regarding the political structure went hand in hand. The HP expressed appreciation for the joint electorate system re-introduced by Musharraf that replaced a separate discriminatory electorate, while simultaneously citing a 'trust deficit' in their representatives seated in the assemblies and cabinet who, they claimed, are beholden to the political parties who selected them and not to the community.

110. (SBU) While the bulk of the HP requests were beyond the provenance of the USG, we noted that several NGOs are already working to provide solutions through community education. The SRSO noted that USG representatives had visited them at least three times in the past year and they are placing high hopes on receiving U.S. assistance. END COMMENT.

